

Ramakrushna Nand: Author and Illustrator for Children

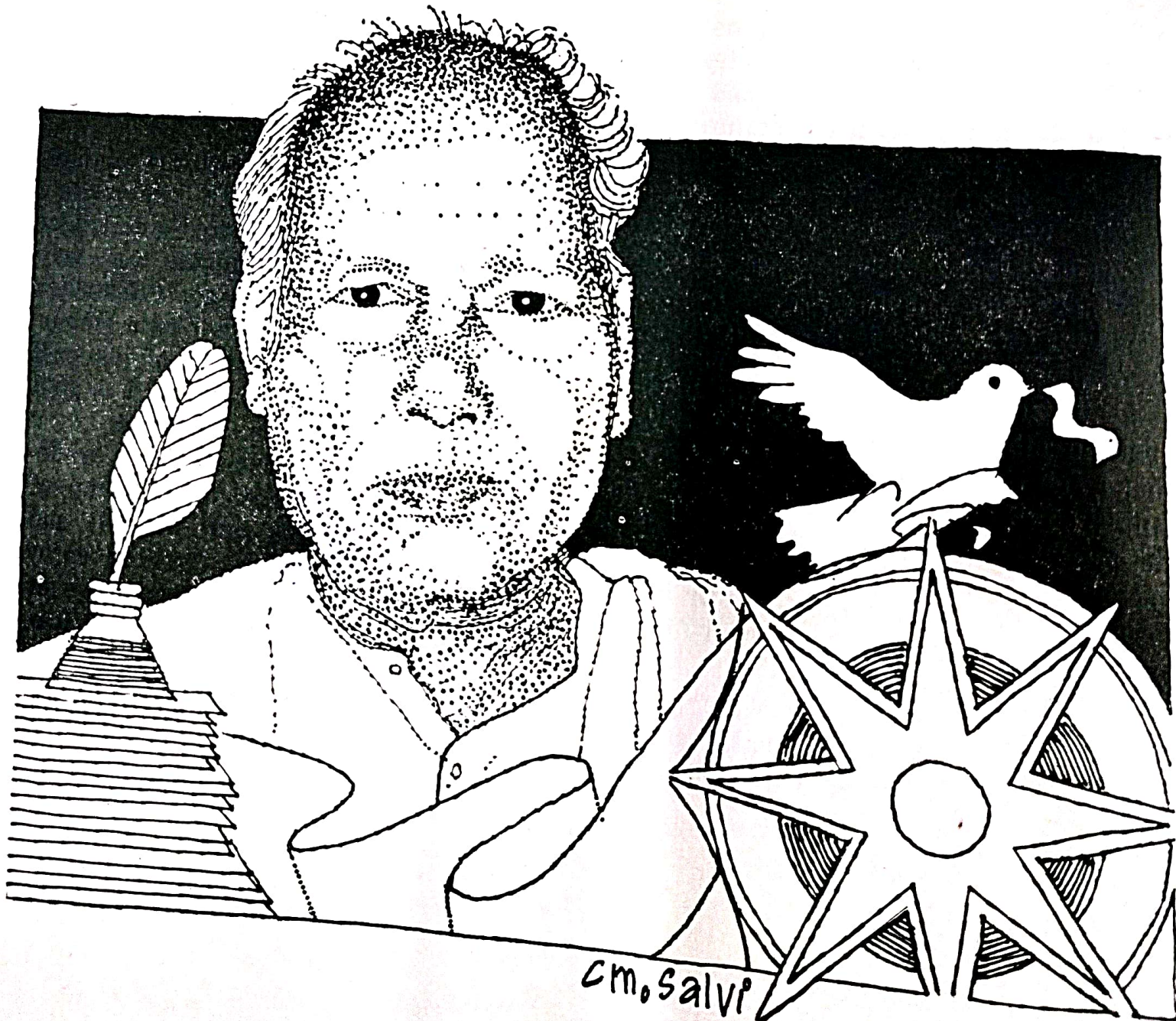
—JAGANNATH MOHANTY

"Why shall I fear to speak the truth?
Rather I may die for the sake of truth,"

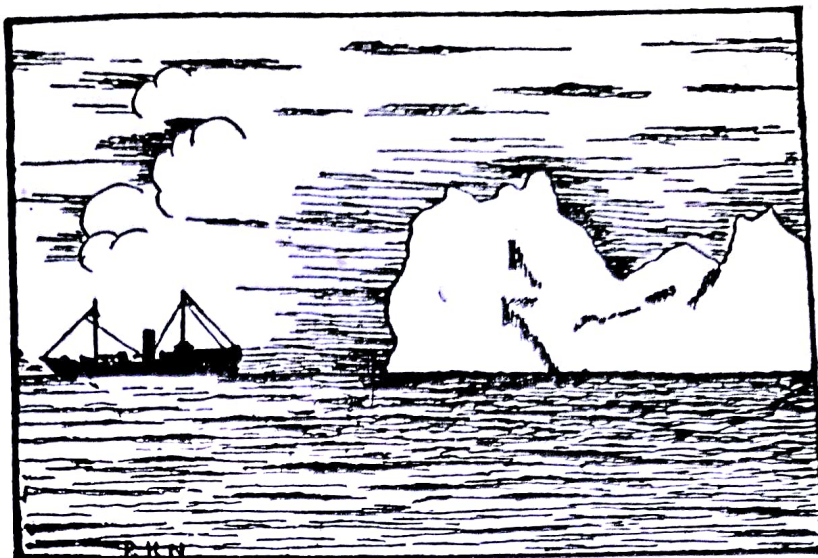
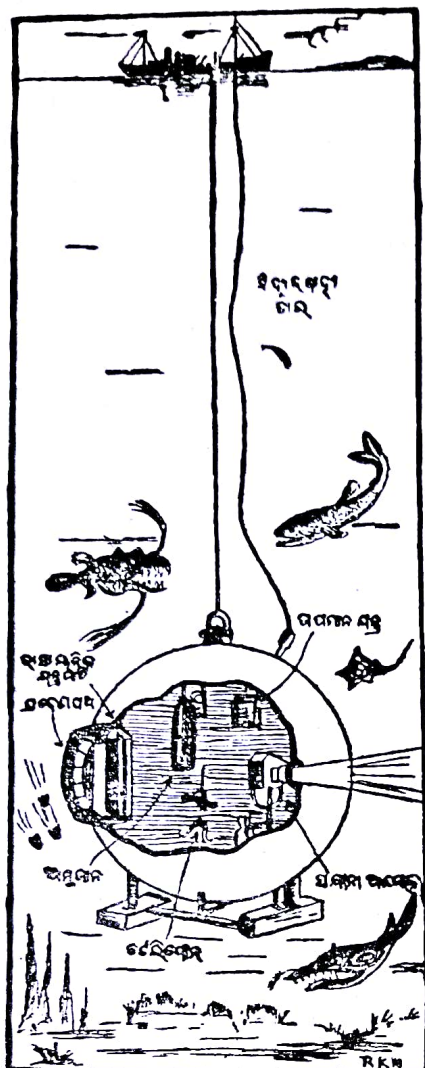
Says the closing stanza of a prayer song composed by Ramakrushna Nand. This prayer song has begun the school day for the last forty-five years in schools throughout the State of Orissa. The philosophy and values of the life of a true *satyagrahi* are reflected in this poem. This is also the life-mission and message of its poet Rama-

krushna. He has rightly said in his simple autobiography, "I have not advised anybody to do anything that I have not been able to do in my own life. Doctor and Teacher — one cures the diseases and another prevents diseases. I have been trying to prevent diseases among students. This is my self-satisfaction."

Ramakrushna Nand has been a true teacher throughout his life. He has dedicated his life to children's welfare as a teacher, as a writer, as an artist, as a printer, as a journalist, as a craftsman, as a freedom fighter, as a social worker and as a reformer. A self-made man, he is product of the Satyavadi Culture, a successor



A Bathysphere used by Dr. Beebe to explore the Ocean surface during the Atlantic Expedition : Illustrated by Ramakrushna Nand.



From Sangram O Sadhna

all kinds of traditional ornaments that the boys wore at that time. He learnt by heart the ancient Oriya Lyric poems like Kala Kalebar Kahnai, Kahai Mana Are Mo Bolakar, Gopibhasha Chautisa. He had a very strong thirst for knowledge and skills. He was awarded L.P. Scholarship which was only Rs 2/- per month at the time and stood first in the M.E. Scholarship Examination in the entire State of Orissa.

He was also a proficient actor and got a copy of the Chamber's English Dictionary as a prize for successfully playing the role of the Robber in the drama "Alexander and the Robber" on the occasion of the Annual Prize Distribution Ceremony of the M.E. School. He studied his matriculation in the Ravenshaw Collegiate School, the premier high school of the State and was extremely popular among the students as well as teachers who were distinguished educators, at that time. Every now and then he was contributing articles to the class-magazine "Chandrika" and his first poem "Shaibya" was published in the year 1920.

The Freedom Movement

The whirlwind raised in the national life of the country not only affected dif-

of the ancient Indian Ashramite heritage. But his contribution to the growth and development of children's literature in Orissa is remarkable.

Ramakrushna Nand was born on 15th February, 1906 in the small village of Bairoi in Cuttack district. He hailed from a respectable middle class family with a rich heritage.

Early Education

Ramakrushna got his early education in a small *Chatasali* (a private single-teacher village-school) where he started going at the age of four. He was extremely inquisitive as well as persevering and used to ask questions to his parents off and on. He was attending schools wearing

ferent parts of India, but also the young life of Ramakrushna at the time. When he was reading in the Matriculation second class, he once attended a public meeting held against British rule and the atrocities perpetrated at Jalianwala Bag and under the Rowlatt Act. The fiery and moving speeches of the then freedom fighters, especially of the Utkalmani Gopabandhu Dash moved Ramakrushna deeply. He left school and joined the Non-cooperation Movement in 1921, working as a young volunteer, preaching the message of the Movement, wearing *khadi* and spinning thread on the *charkha*.

He encouraged village people to cultivate cotton, given up intoxicants, remove untouchability and stop using foreign goods. He lived in *ashrama* collecting alms for the movement, and doing all the work of rural reconstruction himself.

When Ramakrushna was living in the Cuttack Swarajashram in 1922, a memorable event took place. He has described it in his autobiography, "That year the members of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee reached Cuttack. The leaders and volunteers had been to the Railway Station with a horse-driven coach. I also accompanied the other co-workers upto the Station. Motilal Nehru, father of Jawaharlal and other three distinguished Congress leaders came by the coach belonging to Ganeshlal Pandit. I was standing on one side of the carriage holding a gas-light and Rajakrushna Babu, a veteran (Congress leader) was on the other side of the same. I thought myself extremely fortunate in the company of the all-India leaders, may be as an ordinary volunteer. That memory still today creates pride in me." This incident shows young Ramakrushna's deep sense of patriotism.

He was immensely inspired by a book of patriotic poems entitled *Mohan Bansbi*, written by the Jatiyakabi Birakishore Das,

an immortal poet for children.

In 1923 Ramakrushna was taken to the National School at Sakhi Gopal by Pandit Neelakanth Das, a celebrated leader, author and scholar, and again started his student life there under the guidance of the eminent teachers of the school. He was put into the final year of the matriculation course and remained in the hostel. Acharya Harihar was the warden of the hostel and his loving care and affection left an indelible impression on the boy.

As per the rigorous practices that were in vogue in the Sakhigopal National School (Vana Vidyalaya), Ramakrushna kept himself engaged in mass prayer, physical exercise — including *Dand*, *Baithak*, drill and marching — homestudy, class attendance, craftwork, social-work recitation, debate and discussion, in the tradition of *Gurukul Ashram*. But Ramakrushna's education came to an end as there was no higher class in the school.

He started his service when he was only 19, as a spinning teacher under the Cuttack District Board at Rs 20 per month. He used to teach spinning to the teachers and students in the Badachana area. Gopabandhu Choudhury, the famous social worker who resigned from the post of a Deputy Collector to fight against alien rule, was his philosopher guide.

In 1925, when he was 19 years old, he was married to a girl of only 9 years. His father-in-law and one well-wishing friend encouraged him to continue studying in spite of obstacles. With much difficulty, however, he was admitted into the final year of the Ravenshaw Collegiate school and passed his matriculation in the Second Division. He then continued in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, supporting himself by giving tuitions in the mornings and afternoon. He passed his Intermediate in 1927 in the first division and got a scholarship of Rs 20. He was also graduated from the

same college with Honours in English during 1929. Although he started on his M.A. and Law degree, he had to discontinue his studies because of personal difficulties.

Writing and Illustrating

Ramakrushna started his writing in school, contributing articles to the class magazine, school journal and the literary magazines of the time. His books *Tulasi Das*, a Matriculation translation book, and a translated version of *Sohrab and Rustum* by Mathew Arnold, were published when he was in college. When he was teacher at Banki and Baripala High Schools (1935-40), he wrote textbooks *Sahitya Sopan* (1st and 2nd part), which were prescribed for primary school children of Orissa, and *Sahitya Bodhi* (1st and 2nd part). He wrote a drama "*Krushna Kumari*" which was staged by the children of Baripada High School. He translated *Don Quixote* into Oriya, and in Joint authorship brought out a book *Rachana Darpana* for Matric students.

The first part of his famous book *Sangram O Sadhana* was published in 1940: the second part in 1943. This book consists of many interesting stories of scientific inventions and discoveries, and some of the illustrations were designed by the author himself. As an artist, he was also interested in photography and learnt developing, printing and enlarging as a hobby during his stay at Baripada.

Although Ramakrushna earned reputation as a teacher and as a headmaster, he did not want to continue in this profession for good. He resigned from the job and started a successful printing press at Cuttack. He was approached by many political leaders to stand for election with their support, but he refused.

Writing for Children

In 1951 Ramakrushna opened a new chapter in history of children's journals. Prior to this, he was writing articles for children's journals and books for children. But now he wanted to bring out a journal which would not only cater to the literary needs, but also give the young readers information on science and technology. This he did with many reservations in the beginning but *Sansar* became a success. It became popular with school children and played an important role in purveying new knowledge and suitable reading materials for them. It also provided a favourable forum for new writers of quality juvenile literature.

Another unique contribution of Ramakrushna was his one volume *Viswa Parichaya* (Children's Encyclopaedia), which was the first of its kind in Orissa. It was published by the Cuttack Publishing House in 1962. He wrote and brought out a series of stories entitled *Chhaati Gachh* in seven volumes between 1977 and 1981. His autobiography, *Jiven Tarang* (1969) is both interesting and inspiring.

His *Jhumuka* (1975) consists of poems based on curiosity, patriotism, devotion, morality and natural beauty. The appealing style, simple language and sweet rhythm of these poems are remarkable, and brought the writer an award from the Orissa Sahitya Academy in 1980.

Prakrutir Golap Puri is a lively description of animals, birds and natural phenomena told through interesting stories. He was nominated by the Government of India for finally judging the entries for awards in the All India Children's Literature Competition.

On the whole, Ramakrushna Nand has manifested his inborn creative talent through innumerable achievements in the field of Children's art and literature. His

noble mission and lofty ideals of life are distinctly reflected in his poems, stories, essays, and biographical as well as autobiographical sketches. He has made tireless efforts for the all-round development of the child's personality and improvement of the national heritage. He has been felicitated by a large number of literary and cultural organisations throughout the

state for his valuable contributions to children's art and literature.

Today at 77, he is still active, encouraging the new generation of children's authors through his revived journal *Sansar* and through his learned advice in various literary organisations and conferences. Today he is the most esteemed and honoured author for children of modern Orissa.

"To write for children was a logical development for me. I wanted to write, not as a grown up looking back, but as a former child, remembering the emotional landscape I had once moved in, how I had felt, what concerned me, what I wanted to know.

—Nina Bawden

"All writers are middle class, at least by the time they have become successful as writer."

— Nina Bawden

with best wishes

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